Rawsonville Elementary School is located in eastern Washtenaw County. It's location is 3110 Grove Road, which is just west of Rawsonville Road. There is no town of Rawsonville any more except for a few houses and one grocery store. The school is now a part of the Van Buren Public Schools, which is located in Belleville, Michigan. However, Rawsonville was a school and a town before Belleville existed.

The original town of Rawsonville was formed in 1825, by Henry H. Snow who came from Maine and was the third purchaser of land in Van Buren Township. He erected a sawmill on the Huron River and with others soon settling here, named the settlement Snow's Landing. Even to this date, a road which runs for approximately a mile connecting Grove and Rawsonville Roads together, is known as Snow Road. "About the year 1825, Amaiah Rawson came to the Huron River Valley and settled on a large tract of land, building a log house for himself and his family on the south bank overlooking the stream."1

Rawson had moved to this river side community after first exploring the area around Saline. At this time, Woodruff's Grove, which is now Ypsilanti was only two years old, and Ann Arbor only one year old. Rawson build a sawmill in 1825, and Snow sold his sawmill out to Abel Millington, who later became one of the first trustees of Ypsilanti in 1832.

Rawson was the leading spirit of the new community at Snow's Landing. He renamed the village Michigan City, but later, when he became postmaster and the Justice of

the Peace, the residents voted to name the village Rawsonville in his honor.

This was a prosperous time for Rawsonville and at this time people were using the Huron River to go to Lake Erie. The reason for this was the fact that the roads were almost impassable. Some of the boats that made the journey, carried as much as twenty tons of freight. At some time during the 1830's the first log school house is thought to have been constructed. However, no exact date could be found for it. The village kept growing and reached its peak at approximately the time of the civil war. The town of Rawsonville consisting of the following at this time: two cooper shops, a large stove factory, three blacksmiths, a woolen vill, a distillery, a saw mill, three saloons, a grist mill, a cheese factory, and a large tavern. The tavern is still standing at the present day and is lived in by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Mosley. At one time Henry Ford had the second floor of the tavern restored and turned into a place where young people of the area could learn to square dance.

The log school house was replaced at approximately 1860 by a red brick building, which still stands on Snow road at the foot of the hill. It is now the residence of some family. It has been said that the same man who built this building also built a similiar one in Willow Run. The old log school house then became a blacksmith shop. The new school became the pride of the community. It had a fence all around it and a bell cupola over the door.

Addie Rawson, who was the granddaughter of Amariah

Rawson, recalled her schoolhood days in a 1950 newspaper account in the Ypsilanti Daily Press. It was at approximately the late 1860's when she was in school. She said that there were around 125 people in school at this time, and that she never knew what grade she was in. The reason behind this was that each new teacher started everyone at the beginning of the book and it was very seldom that a teacher stayed for more than one year. The school did not have items, which are now part of the everyday curriculum, such as globes, maps and paper. Instead of paper each student had a slate. She said that the textbooks were uninteresting and that vacations were short. Every year, an inspector from Normal College, now Eastern Michigan University, came to visit. [illegible] was grammar, arithmetic was kept on a simple level, and spelling was confusing. She recalled two of the old teachers she had. One was George Alban and another was J.L. Croker. Her mother had also been a teacher and had told that she had received one dollar for a weeks work.

Discipline in this era was very strict and whipping was the usual approach according to old-time resident of Lawrenville, Henry Leonard. The most common whip was made from the willows which grew along the river bank. A long switch was cut from the tree, the bark removed, and the switch put on the stove until it becomes tough and strong. It was several feet long when finished. Another method of punishment was "feruling" which was having the palms of the hands hit sharply with a heavy ruler or ferule.

However, the prosperity of Rawsonville and its school were short lived. The reason was very simple. The railroads were in the wrong places. The Michigan Central ran about three miles north of Rawsonville and the Wabash about the same dist nce south of Rawsonville. Up to this time Rawsonville had depended upon the river for its livlihood, but now with the advent of the railroads, Rawsonville started to decline. So, because of inadequate transportation, the businesses of the town went to Belleville, and Ypsilanti, and other nearby towns.

"Like the business and commercial interest of the town, the population of Rawsonville has progressively decreased with the passing years. From a reputed population of nearly 400 in the 1840's, it had slumped to 160 in 1875. In 1901, it had a population of 7?"? The businesses went as such in 1877: Byron Ayers, carriage and wagon manufactor, William Bedail, cooper, Lennis Cheever, general store, Gina Buck, blacksmith, Issac Bumpus, cooper, C.J. Cook, flour mill, Peter Dickerson, cheese manufacturer, William Fell, yarn manufacturer, William Fausch, boots and shoes, O.L. Quick, hotel and blacksmith shops, J.H. Gechner, general store and post office, George Shipton, woolen mills, and G.F. Woodruff, flour mill. The businesses continued to go down until 1930 when there was no business of any kind.

Adam Yeckley was the school teacher in 1901, and it is said that he had a wonderful collection of Indian artifacts, which he had found on the farm where he lived.

This farm was located approximately at what is now the corner of Grove and Bridge Roads which are near Rawsonville School. This farm was thought to have been located over an old Indian Burial Ground. At the time Yackley was the teacher of Rawsonville School, attendance had dropped considerably from the 125 in the 1800's. School was held, however, except for two or three years when there weren't enough students to hold school. The remaining students traveled to Willow Run to go to school.

However, Rawsonville School did not die its final death, as Henry Ford began to take interest in this area. First, he helped reopen the school that was built in Willow Run similiar to Rawsonville. That was in 1931. Mr. Ford remodeled the school and attended its reopening on September 9, 1931. Superintendent Frank Cody of the Detroit Schools acted as Master of Ceremonies, and he recalled how 43 years before he had walked four miles a day to preside over this school as the teacher.

Mr. Ford also became interested in Rawsonville School at this time and in 1934 began publishing a journal for fourteen schools he was interested in. Rawsonville was one of these schools. At the beginning of the first journal he wrote a short message which I will repeat here, "I have been asked to write a few words for the first number of your new school paper. There is one rule in our school which is the basis of everyother rule, and that is-help one another. Everybody help each other. It is simple, isn't it? But when we do that we prevent a lot of things going wrong.

One of the best life lessons you can learn in this school is to help one another. In our school every boy and girl has something to do which makes the school better for everyother boy and girl."3

He also went on to say to work hard and play fair. Mr. Ford also let the children of Rawsonville have a share in the school gardens across the road from the Willow Run School. Once or twice a week, a bus would come out from Mr. Ford and transport the students to the garden to work. Because of his interest in the school, Mr. Ford also helped the students of the school in other ways. Among these different ways were the following: picking up the children, taking them to the hospital for shots, vitamins, eye care, tonsillectomies, and so on. One particular student from Willow Run needed eye surgery, and so Mr. Ford imported a surgeon from Vienna to do eye surgery for her. At approximately this time, Mr. Ford offered to take over Rawsonville School, as he had done with the school in Willow Run. However, the people of the community decided against this because they thought that Mr. Ford would import his own teacher. Mrs. Allen, who was the teacher at this time, had many friends in the community and so, the community decided not to let Henry Ford take over Rawsonville School.

During the 1930's A.A. Susterka was one of the school directors, and he took a large interest in the school as is shown by the many articles about him included in the Herald. For example the following, "Every Wednesday Mr. Susterka comes and shows us

interesting things. Last Wednesday he showed us how to make a Ford factory out of spools, nails, a board, string and a piece of wire. It is fun to play with these things."[4] This was written by a student, Donald Basso. Mr. Susterka converted an old mill pond into Susterka Lake which until recently had been a gathering place for young people for many years. It is located on Huron River Drive just east of Rawsonville Road. Recently however, the state health department has closed it down.

In 1935 there were 16 pupils enrolled at Rawsonville School, which had been the largest enrollment in ten years. At that time, Mrs. Alice Boyd, who is now the secretary of Rawsonville School, recalls that her daughter would take a potato to school with her each day. When she arrived at the school she would place the potato by the stove and by lunch she would have a baked potato.

The school at that time went from kindergarten to eighth grade with the result being much cross-age tutoring. The attendance was soon to rise with the constrution of the Bomber Plant by the Ford Motor Company, which is now the General Motors Plant. This construction brought many new families into the area. By 1938 the attendance had jumped up to 54 students, and it became apparent that the old one-room school had served its duty. The condition was deteriorating since it had been there since 1860. Mrs. Lucy Allen was still teaching all the grades at that time. So, early in the 1940's the old wing of the present building was built at the top of Snow Hill. For a time the old

brick building was still used for the upper grades. Finally, all grades left it and after awhile it became a Sunday School. Soon, however, the Sunday School grew too large and it too left the old building. After this it became a private residence.

The new school at the top of the hill had three rooms and this soon became too small. So, an addition of two rooms with an auditorium below was built on. This didn't help for long and soon the auditorium also became classrooms. By this time Mrs. Allen was replaced by a staff of seven people. One of these people, Frank F. Henry who was the principal-superintendent, had the new school dedicated after him. The school was known as the Franklin F. Henry School.

Soon after this, dissension hit the school. It became impossible to support the school and so it had to be annexed to some district. Many people wanted to stay independent, but financially it looked impossible. The problem was where should they consolidate. Basically most everyone wanted to go to Ypsilanti, but the schools there were already overcrowded and couldn't handle any more students. The Lincoln School District was considered but it was decided that it was too far away. Belleville was finally decided upon although many people were unhappy about this. One of the reasons that the people were dissatified about was the fact that the Van Buren School District would not let the school continue to be called the Frank F. Henry school and Van Buren Schools would not hire Mr. Henry in an administrator.

QUOTATIONS

[1]Herald, Published by the Children of Edison Institute, February 11, 1934, Vol. 1, No. 1, page 9.

[2]Ypsilanti Daily Press, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Saturday, October 20, 1934, Part II, Page 18.

[3]Herald, Published by the Children of Edison Institute, Preface, Page 7.

[4]Herald, Published by the Children of Edison Institute, March 8, 1935, Vol. II, No. 3, Page 10.

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INTERVIEWS

Mrs. Alice Boyd, longtime resident of the area.

Mr. Clyde D. Stapleton, present principal of Rawsonville Elementary School.

Mr. Robert Gray, assistant superintendent of Van Buren Public Schools and ex-principal of Rawsonville Elementary School.

From Jane Mabe
Rawsonville School
5-13-1997